

FORTY YEARS TO BUILD AND FOUR YEARS TO DESTROY;

A
Tragedy of the Rubber Trust.

THERE are two towns of Colchester. Colchester, the living, and Colchester, the dead.

Colchester, the living, is a beautiful old town that lies dreaming on a windy hill. It has a great broad avenue, fit for an emperor's parade, and it has rows of great stately houses, and it has a graveyard full of stones with the eighteenth century date on them.

There are fine churches in Colchester, the living, and there are good schools there, and an academy, where the Southern children used to come "before the war."

Every one of the stately old houses has a history, and the great elms in the broad avenue whisper about them all day and all night.

The dead Colchester lies down at the foot of the hill.

The Rubber Trust has killed it. It is a pity. Colchester the dead must have been a cheery, homely little place when it was alive. It's built in a shelter-shelter, happy-go-lucky style, with queer little fenced-in gardens and funny little half-grown houses—and every one of the houses looked as if it ought to have a plant or two in the window and three or four babies in the doorway.

The first house I came to in dead Colchester was a comfortable building, with a painted door and a gate with a colored latch.

The gate was off its hinge, and it creaked dully when I tried to open it.

"Lookin' fer me?" said a voice from nowhere. A little weakened man, with a pair of shining blue eyes set deep in his wrinkled face, came out from the side of the house.

"I don't know," I said. "Do you live here?" The little weakened man gave a twisted smile. "N-no," he said. "I ain't so bad off as that yet. You can live here, if you want to—and you needn't pay rent, either."

"Does it belong to you—this house?"

"N-no," said the weakened little man. "No—no; the one next to it does. You can't live in that—not by my word. It ain't going to belong to me after to-day. There's a mortgage on it. I've been rakin' and scampin' and workin' and contrivin' to get the money to settle that mortgage. I couldn't do it. Wa-al,—the little old man gave a sigh that was half a groan and half a pretence of a yawn—"I guess it's just as well. Just about as well, after all. I ain't any too lively. I've been through too much to be very spry—but I ain't come to livin' in a graveyard yet."

"A graveyard?" I began.

"That's what I said," said the little old man; "and that's what it is—a graveyard. I'm going to write to the folks that got my mortgage, that they can come and take my mortgage, that they can come and take my family vault, soon's ever they're a mind to."

The little man tried to laugh, and I tried to laugh.

We neither of us made much of a success at it.

"How long have you been away from here?" said I.

"Let's see," said the little old man; "let's see: ten, fifteen—I come here fifteen years ago. I didn't have any home then. I ain't got any home now. So I'm 'bout even, ain't I? Well, when I came here, I came to go into the mills. I was a good hand on rubber, and I got a job right off—and got good money, too. I used to make \$12 or \$15 a week. My wife, she went to work, and got a job in the rubber shoe factory, and she used to make full \$8 a week."

We boarded for a spell, and then we made up our minds to have a home. We worked at piece work. Tell you, many's the day I've fairly put bit and spur to my hands, makin' 'em fly. Every time I thought of my home a-whittin' for me I could work like one possessed."

"My wife. She was a good deal the same way. Well, it didn't seem like any time till we'd saved up enough to buy a lot. Then we just fairly scurried along till we could begin to build."

"We broke ground in May—'twas a pretty day—and my wife and I walked up to the lot, and stood there quite a spell, in the evenin', and looked at the ground where the men had been at work."

"We got so we used to go up to the lot most every evenin' when 'twas pleasant. There was a young couple used to come up just ahead of us."

"They had the lot next to ours, and they was goin' to build, too."

"They used to quarrel and dispute like a pair o' blue jays, come nes'in' time."

"Arguing over how many pantries they'd have. He wanted only one, and she was just set to have two."

"My wife and I, we used to look at one another and kind o' smile when we heard 'em arguing like that. We never had disputes about our house."

"You see, we was kind o' long in years, an' we'd never had much luck before. We'd had sickness and we'd lost our two children—both died down in Worcester; buried there—long o' her, now—an' my wife, she was kind o' poorly for a long time after they died, and we'd never got ahead much."

"So we felt pretty gay about our new house, at our time o' life. See, I was turned forty then, and she wasn't much behind—looked younger than I did though—always did."

"Well, when the house got along pretty near done, seemed as if we couldn't rest till we got into it."

"It was a real good house. There was a parlor and a kitchen, and two bedrooms—one for a spare chamber—and there was a sitting room, just to keep the parlor nice, and there were two pantries and lots of good cubby closets scattered round handy."

"I'd take you in to see it," said the little man, turning suddenly away from me, "but I couldn't git up my spunk to go in there. Been tryin' all mornin'. Guess I'll have to give it up."

I looked at the little house next door. It was a cheap little house, with a straight porch in front and a peaked, up and down roof. I said something about its looking comfortable, and something about the lot, and something about the street, and finally the little man turned his wrinkled face to me again.

"Well," he said, quite as if he had been speaking all the time, "well, we moved in. Wife she crocheted tidies and she made mottoes, an' her cousin came to visit us from Worcester, and she brought her a canary bird, and one of her cousins down Salem way he sent her a shell from the South Seas, and we was fixed up pretty nice. Only thing, my wife she used to fret some about the children. She got a notion of bringin' them down here and buryin' them in a corner of the garden, but the neighbors they wouldn't hear of it; said 'twas heathenish, so she let it drop. My wife she was a great hand for flowers. She had the sittin' room full o' geraniums and ivy and Johnny-creeper-over-the-ground, and what not, and then—the little man's weakened face grew stiff and hard—"then the Rubber Trust came and bought out the hills and shut 'em down one by one."

"When my mill, where I was, shut, I went to one of the others. I was known for a good hand, and I got work right off. But that one shut down, and then I was out. The lot was paid for, but the house wasn't, quite, so I put a mortgage on the lot. My wife she cried the day I mortgaged the lot, but I had to do it."

"And then there was no work—and every one begun to move, and I had to go to Boston to look for work; and my wife, she got poorly, and she went to visit her folks in Worcester, an' I never saw her alive again. Couldn't get work and couldn't get money, an' before I could get there—she was dead. Her folks were real good. They buried her right by the children."

"They said she talked a good deal about the house when she was sick. I said she seemed to hate to think of it bein' left alone all winter in the snow." The little man smiled a little, twisted smile. "Sick folks get queer notions," he said, apologetically.

"That's what I said," said the little old man; "and that's what it is—a graveyard. I'm going to write to the folks that got my mortgage, that they can come and take my family vault, soon's ever they're a mind to."

"I've got a job now. Fairly good job as time goes nowadays. I've saved a little, and I come down here to-day to see the house, an' to see if there couldn't something be done to keep the mortgage folks off till I could get the money together. I guess I don't want to do anything now. I see the young couple that had the lot next to ours is gone, too. They hung on a long time. They had to leave their house, too. Can't get any rent for it. Nobody can. You can have any of these houses you want rent free. I counted 'em this mornin'."

There's seventy-two of 'em. Seventy-two empty houses, and the folks that owns 'em's driven away—and all the money they saved and worked for is gone—gone with the houses."

"Look at this house here. I knew the folks that lived here. Better neighbors never breathed."

"Man and his wife and daughter and the man's sister."

"They all worked, and they all got good wages."

"They built 'em a good house, and they had a patch of garden, and they had a carpet in the parlor, and a fine album and some pictures, and they sent home to Ireland for the old mother."

"Well, now, when the mother came you'd a laughed. Such a time as they made. The sister got married and the old mother was here in time for the wedding."

"She was a little bit of a whiffer, and she wore a big white cap and she smoked a

clay pipe, but land sakes, she danced at the wedding the same as if she'd been sixteen."

"She took a slight of comfort in that house."

"Used to work in the garden when the folks had gone to the mill. Well, she was all right, when things was all right. She'd clip around that house as lively as a cricket, and she always had a jokin' word—a great hand to joke she was—but when the mills began to shut down she was awful scary."

"The first one that shut down she gave a screech when she heard about it and she covered her head with her apron and she never looked out, only to give one of them outlandish screeches, all day."

"She was a little bit of a whiffer, and she wore a big white cap and she smoked a

A DESERTED VILLAGE AND ITS PATHETIC STORY.

By
Winifred Black.

"She'd always get one of them awful spells just about when a mill was goin' to close down, and there was no doin' any-thing with her."

"It used to get my wife awful nervous and kind o' down to hear her screech that way."

"Well, they're gone."

"Starved out."

"Left the house and the garden and all. The old lady, she shook her fist at it the day she went."

"The folks next to them was Irish, too."

"Most of the hands was Irish."

"They were young."

"The man, he builds the house for his wife and he sent to Ireland for her and she came, and was married in church the day she got here and went right into the house."

"She looked on it as a palace."

"Peared kinder o' 'frail of it."

"Guess she wasn't used to much. Well, they fixed their house up real good and liveable."

"They're gone."

"Starved out. Livin' in Boston, I hear. Poorly off, I guess. One, two, three, four—seventy-five of 'em. Seventy-five families—starved out."

"Some of the men's trampin'."

"I don't know what's come of their wives and children."

"Biotin' pretty poorly, I guess. What do I make of it all?"

"The little man's weakened face was blank."

"Noblin'," he said.

"Poor folks' luck, I guess. Them rich men want to get richer yet—and they all got together, and plan how to do it, and the poor folk jest got to get out o' the way."

"They'll get fast enough."

"Seventy-two houses—seventy-two families starved out—queer idea, ain't it? Guess I'll go on up to Boston an' git to work again. Hate to let the house go—but there—there ain't much profit in ownin' a lot in a buyin' ground."

The weakened-faced little man told the truth.

There are seventy-two vacant houses in the dead Colchester. Seventy-two houses to be lived in for the asking, or without the asking, for matter of that.

The empty windows stare out at the empty street, and the wind snarls around the dripping eaves, and poor little Colchester under the hill is dead—killed by the trusts.

I went up the hill to the living Colchester. I saw a sign on a neat little building. "Colchester Advocate," said the sign. I could not find the entrance to the Colchester Advocate's office, so I went into the post office to inquire.

A very pretty girl stood at the post office window.

"Can you tell me how I can get a copy of the Advocate?" I said.

"There isn't any Advocate," said the pretty girl.

"It's dead."

"When did it die?"

"A few months ago."

"What killed it?"

"Well—the mills closed, you see, and"—

"Is there another paper?"

The pretty girl made her round eyes very big.

"Why, no," she said.

"I want to see a great square hotel to get something to eat. I asked a man for the best hotel in town, and he stared at me."

"There ain't but one," he said.

So I went to the one, and I ate a good meal, in a great, empty dining room, and a man came in to the table and told me how lively Colchester used to be before the trust came. I went to see the leading citizen of Colchester. He is a very intelligent man, and a very courteous one—the leading citizen—and he told me many things.

He told me how Colchester was one of the oldest towns in New England, and he showed me a garden full of old tombstones. He said that the closing of the mills had undoubtedly hurt Colchester a

good deal, but that Colchester was by no means dying. He said that there were good times ahead for Colchester, and he told me about the great natural advantages of the place.

"The trust has kept the mills shut ever since it bought them," he said, "but there is a rumor that some one is going to buy them. Not for rubber mills, of course. The trust won't allow that. In the meantime we must trust to a gradual reaction and to a natural, unforced growth."

I met some charming women in Colchester. They all lived in beautiful old houses in the beautiful old street, and they all said that Colchester was one of the prettiest towns in New England, and that the society was very select. They were all very sorry about the mills.

"It did hurt the working people very much," they said. "Of course, the merchants probably felt the closing of the mills, too, in a way, but not ruinously, by any means."

"Colchester," said one of the ladies; "Colchester has not learned to depend entirely upon the mills, yet. You see, the mills were a very recent thing, and they could not be looked upon as anything much more than a new experiment."

"Recent," said I; "why, when were they first established? I understood there were mills here years and years before the trust began to close them."

"Oh, no," said one of the ladies.

"The mills are very recent; they were started only fifty years ago."

"Fifty years ago?"

"Fifty years ago the dreaming old town was aroused by the sound of hammers and of whistles, and forty years ago the collection under the hill sprang up, and thirty years ago the place was full of bright, bustling life."

"Young men and young women earned good wages, and there were merry makings and pleasure jaunts, and the Colchester milliners made many gay hats, and the little Colchester seamstresses had enough work and to spare. And the travelling fish man did a rushing business o' Fridays, and the meat man grew prosperous, and the grocers began to put up new shops. And there were weddings and christenings, and twenty years ago the little Colchester under the hill was gay o' nights, with honest work and cheerful, hopeful saving. Four years ago the trust came to Colchester."

"Four little years ago—and the little, lively, bustling village is dead. Dead as if a plague had swept over it. The deserted houses stand like gravestones in a forgotten graveyard."

"And the people who worked and saved, and sang and loved and hoped there—where are they?"

"Gone!"

"Starved out?"

"Starved out by Enterprize and Capital and Business Ability and the Progress of the Age. Starved out by the Great Rubber Trust."

WINIFRED BLACK.

AN ATHLETE AT EIGHTY.

His Hair Had Become Very White, but Yet He Incessantly Stood on His Head.

Blondin, who gained fame by walking over Niagara Falls on a tight rope, died recently in London. He was upward of eighty years of age, but retained his strength and agility to the last. The Daily News remarks:

"He was playful as a kitten to the last, and, old and white-headed as he was, he would sometimes suddenly throw himself on his hands in his garden, and walk for some seconds with his head down and his heels in the air."

This behavior is exactly like that described in a familiar verse of "Alice in Wonderland":

"You are old, Father William," the young man said.
"And your hair has become very white,
But yet you incessantly stand on your head,
Do you think at your age it is right?"